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Harding, Warren G., Pres. U.S.

ADDRESS

OF THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

at the Opening of the

CONFERENCE
ON LIMITATION
OF ARMAMENT
AT WASHINGTON
NOVEMBER-12, 1921



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REPORT OF THE
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ADDRESS.

MR. SECRETARY AND MEMBERS OF THE CONFERENCE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: It is a great and happy privilege to bid the delegates to this Conference a cordial welcome to the Capital of the United States of America. It is not only a satisfaction to greet you because we were lately participants in a common cause, in which shared sacrifices and sorrows and triumphs brought our nations more closely together, but it is gratifying to address you as the spokesmen for nations whose convictions and attending actions have so much to do with the weal or woe of all mankind.

It is not possible to overappraise the importance of such a conference. It is no unseemly boast, no disparagement of other nations which, though not represented, are held in highest respect, to declare that the conclusions of this body will have a signal influence on all human progress—on the fortunes of the world.

Here is a meeting, I can well believe, which is an earnest of the awakened conscience of twentieth century civilization. It is not a convention of remorse, nor a session of sorrow. It is not the conference of victors to define terms of settlement. Nor is it a council of nations seeking to remake humankind. It is rather a coming together, from all parts of the earth, to apply the better attributes of mankind to minimize the faults in our international relationships.

Speaking as official sponsor for the invitation, I think I may say the call is not of the United States of America alone, it is rather the spoken word of a war-wearied world, struggling for restoration, hungering and thirsting for better relationship; of humanity crying for relief and craving assurances of lasting peace.

It is easy to understand this world-wide aspiration. The glory of triumph, the rejoicing in achievement, the love of liberty, the devotion to country, the pangs of sorrow, the burdens of debt, the desolation of ruin—all these are appraised alike in all lands. Here in the United States we are but freshly turned from the burial of an unknown American soldier, when a nation sorrowed while paying him tribute. Whether it was spoken or not, a hundred millions of our people were summarizing the inexcusable causes, the incalculable cost, the unspeakable sacrifices, and the unutterable sorrows, and there was the ever impelling question: How can humanity justify or God forgive? Human hate demands no such toll; ambition and greed must be denied it. If misunderstanding must take the blame,

then let us banish it, and let understanding rule and make good will regnant everywhere. All of us demand liberty and justice. There can not be one without the other, and they must be held the unquestioned possession of all peoples. Inherent rights are of God, and the tragedies of the world originate in their attempted denial. The world to-day is infringing their enjoyment by arming to defend or deny, when simple sanity calls for their recognition through common understanding.

Out of the cataclysm of the World War came new fellowships, new convictions, new aspirations. It is ours to make the most of them. A world staggering with debt needs its burden lifted. Humanity which has been shocked by wanton destruction would minimize the agencies of that destruction. Contemplating the measureless cost of war and the continuing burden of armament, all thoughtful peoples wish for real limitation of armament and would like war outlawed. In soberest reflection the world's hundreds of millions who pay in peace and die in war wish their statesmen to turn the expenditures for destruction into means of construction, aimed at a higher state for those who live and follow after.

It is not alone that the world can not readjust itself and cast aside the excess burdens without relief from the leaders of men. War has grown progressively cruel and more destructive from the first recorded conflict to this pregnant day, and the reverse order would more become our boasted civilization.

Gentlemen of the Conference, the United States welcomes you with unselfish hands. We harbor no fears; we have no sordid ends to serve; we suspect no enemy; we contemplate or apprehend no conquest. Content with what we have, we seek nothing which is another's. We only wish to do with you that finer, nobler thing which no nation can do alone.

We wish to sit with you at the table of international understanding and good will. In good conscience we are eager to meet you frankly, and invite and offer cooperation. The world demands a sober contemplation of the existing order and the realization that there can be no cure without sacrifice, not by one of us, but by all of us.

I do not mean surrendered rights, or narrowed freedom, or denied aspirations, or ignored national necessities. Our Republic would no more ask for these than it would give. No pride need be humbled, no nationality submerged, but I would have a merging of minds committing all of us to less preparation for war and more enjoyment of fortunate peace.

The higher hopes come of the spirit of our coming together. It is but just to recognize varying needs and peculiar positions. Nothing can be accomplished in disregard of national apprehensions. Rather,

we should act together to remove the causes of apprehensions. This is not to be done in intrigue. Greater assurance is found in the exchanges of simple honesty and directness, among men resolved to accomplish as becomes leaders among nations, when civilization itself has come to its crucial test.

It is not to be challenged that government fails when the excess of its cost robs the people of the way to happiness and the opportunity to achieve. If the finer sentiments were not urging, the cold, hard facts of excessive cost and the eloquence of economics would urge us to reduce our armaments. If the concept of a better order does not appeal, then let us ponder the burden and the blight of continued competition.

It is not to be denied that the world has swung along throughout the ages without heeding this call from the kindlier hearts of men. But the same world never before was so tragically brought to realization of the utter futility of passion's sway when reason and conscience and fellowship point a nobler way.

I can speak officially only for our United States. Our hundred millions frankly want less of armament and none of war. Wholly free from guile, sure in our own minds that we harbor no unworthy designs, we accredit the world with the same good intent. So I welcome you, not alone in good will and high purpose, but with high faith.

We are met for a service to mankind. In all simplicity, in all honesty and all honor, there may be written here the avowals of a world conscience refined by the consuming fires of war, and made more sensitive by the anxious aftermath. I hope for that understanding which will emphasize the guarantees of peace, and for commitments to less burdens and a better order which will tranquilize the world. In such an accomplishment there will be added glory to your flags and ours, and the rejoicing of mankind will make the transcending music of all succeeding time.



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